

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM PDIP OVIP MI (BANDA, H. KAMUZU)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: AUSTIN MBISA

SUMMARY: EMBASSY OFFICER (SEITZ) ON APR 19 MET WITH NGWIRI, TEMBO AND ITIMU AT THE MALAWI HIGH COMMISSION. ALL THREE EXPRESSED THEIR FIRM CONVICTION THAT MBISA HAD COMMITTED SUICIDE AND THAT THERE WERE NO MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. NGWIRI IS DISTURBED THAT THE CASE MAY, NEVERTHELESS, COMPLICATE BANDA'S PLANS TO VISIT THE UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA ON MAY 5. HE, THEREFORE, VOLUNTEERED HIMSELF TO LEAVE LONDON ANY TIME IN THE NEXT WEEK IN ORDER TO MEET WITH SENATOR BAYH IF THE SENATOR REMAINS UNCONVINCED. ACTION REQUESTED: WE HAVE PROMISED TO CONTACT NGWIRI IF SENATOR BAYH'S OFFICE ACCEPTS HIS SUGGESTION FOR AN EARLY MEETING. PLEASE ADVISE.
END SUMMARY

1. EMBASSY OFFICER MET WITH NGWIRI, GOVERNOR TEMBO, AND DEPUTY POLICE COMMISSIONER J.Z. ITIMU. NGWIRI RECOUNTED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MBISA'S DEATH AND SAID THERE HAD BEEN NO EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT THE CASE WAS ANYTHING MORE THAN THE SUICIDE OF A SEVERELY DEPRESSED INDIVIDUAL. NGWIRI POINTED OUT THAT MBISA HAD RELATIVES

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IN IMPORTANT POSITIONS WITHIN THE MALAWI GOVERNMENT AND THAT THE FAMILY ITSELF HAD A HISTORY OF SUICIDE (TWO CASES IN THE LAST THREE YEARS). NEVERTHELESS, NGWIRI WAS CONCERNED THAT THE CASE MIGHT BE MISUNDERSTOOD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA AND BY SENATOR BAYH. BECAUSE PRESIDENT BANDA WILL BE IN INDIANA ON MAY 5, NGWIRI SAID HE WAS MOST ANXIOUS TO CLEAR UP THE CASE.

2. TEMBO THEN MADE HIS PRESENTATION. HE SAID HE WAS ENTIRELY SATISFIED THAT MBISA HAD TAKEN HIS OWN LIFE. HE SHOWED EMBASSY OFFICER A COPY OF A LETTER FROM UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI VICE CHANCELLOR DAVID KIMBLE TO THE REGISTRAR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA EXPLAINING MBISA'S DEATH. TEMBO SAID MBISA HAD REPORTED TO A GOVERNMENT HOSTEL ONE WEEK PRIOR TO TAKING UP HIS APPOINTMENT AT THE MALAWI UNIVERSITY. DURING THOSE DAYS SEVERAL PEOPLE HAD MENTIONED THAT MBISA SEEMED DEEPLY DEPRESSED AND WAS BEHAVING IN A PECULIAR FASHION. ON THE MORNING OF FEB 8, MBISA TORE STRIPS FROM THE SHEETS IN HIS ROOM AND HANGED HIMSELF.

3. ITIMU THEN SHOWED EMBASSY OFFICER A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF MBISA AND OF HIS HOSTEL ROOM ON THE MORNING OF HIS DEATH (PHOTOGRAPHS POCHED TO MALAWI DESK). HE ALSO SHOWED A NUMBER OF NOTES WHICH MBISA HAD WRITTEN AND LEFT SCATTERED ABOUT HIS ROOM. THE TRANSLATIONS, WHILE UNCLEAR AS TO MOTIVATION, INDICATE A DISTURBED INDIVIDUAL IN DEEP DEPRESSION. THE NOTES SPEAK OF MBISA'S DISGRACE AND UNHAPPINESS ("PLEASE, I WAS REALLY WRONG. MY EDUCATION HAS DISGRACED ME. I AM REALLY USELESS"; "I AM COMPLETELY DECOMPOSED. ALL DEVILS I HAD ARE ALL MINE"; "I ALSO ASK YOU TO THROW ME IN THE FIRE AND FORGET ME THAT I WAS YOUR SON AND THAT I AM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REALLY USELESS"; ONE MESSAGE WAS SIGNED "FOOL ANIMAL"). ITIMU EXPRESSED HIS OWN CONCLUSION AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE CID THAT THERE WERE NO MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES IN MBISA'S DEATH.

4. NGWIRI SAID HE HOPED THE EXPLANATION WOULD PROVE SATISFACTORY TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, TO SENATOR BAYH, AND TO MBISA'S FRIENDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA. HE SAID, HOWEVER, IF THESE EXPLANATIONS WERE NOT SATISFACTORY, HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO PROCEED DIRECTLY TO WASHINGTON AND MEET WITH SENATOR BAYH IN ORDER TO ANSWER ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS. HE EMPHASIZED HIS WISH THAT PRESIDENT BANDA'S PLAN TO VISIT THE UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA NOT BE MARRED BY THIS CASE.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: SUGGEST DEPT INFORM SENATOR BAYH OF THE REPORT ABOVE AND OF NGWIRI'S OFFER. EMBASSY OFFICER HAS ARRANGED TO SEE NGWIRI AGAIN MONDAY, APR 24. PLEASE ADVISE.

BREWSTER

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